

Jessie Lopez De La Cruz dead at 93

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FRESNO, Calif. – Jessie Lopez De La Cruz, a longtime leader in the national farmworker movement, has died. She was 93.

The United Farmworkers of America says De La Cruz died in Kingsburg, Calif., on Labor Day. She was one of the union's first female members and organizers in the Fresno area.

De La Cruz organized workers in the fields, participated in grape boycotts and testified on outlawing the short-handled hoe, which required workers to bend over at the waist for the entire day.

She also worked with the UFW in campaigns across the state and with the union Cesar Chavez at his office at La Paz in Keene. She also became a delegate to the Democratic National Convention.

Born in Anaheim, Calif., she became part of the UFW in her 40s, after Chavez visited her Parlier home to speak with farmworkers about forming a union and invited her to join.

In addition to her work as a union organizer, De La Cruz taught English to migrant workers and served on the executive board of the California Rural Legal Assistance, which provides legal services.

Friends and family say De La Cruz was known for her humility and devotion to improving the lives of farmworkers. Even in her 90's, De La Cruz would often ask to be taken to political rallies.

Her life has been documented in books, news articles and in a 1998 miniseries titled, "A Will of Their Own."

"Jessie De La Cruz was an icon of the farm worker movement," the UFW said in a statement. She "embodied Cesar Chavez's conviction that ordinary people have within them the ability to do extraordinary things."